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# **Best Practices: Indexing Names & Parties**

**Adopted by the PRIA Board on February 17, 2015**

<http://www.pria.us>

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# Introduction

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## Purpose of the Index

The Recorder's Property Records Index exists in a form very similar to a phone book listing.<sup>1</sup> It is the way to find the necessary citation so that a document itself can be retrieved. It is the document that is important. It is the document that determines whether ownership of property or an interest in the property may have changed. It is the document that must ultimately be evaluated. The index is only a tool to get to the document.

Typical, statutory requirements for an index are 1) names of the parties to the document; 2) the date and time of filing or recording; 3) the document/instrument number (or other location data, such as "book and page"); and 4) the type of document/instrument.

Over the past 75+ years, many Recorders adopted practices of adding information to the index. The Recorders did so to make it easier for customers (often individuals in the property records industries) to figure out whether they might be interested in reviewing the particular document.

Examples of information added to the typical index include: abbreviated legal descriptions, cross-references to related documents or court-case numbers, multiple variations on a name appearing in a document, and an ever-expanding category of types of documents.

As stated above, most of these index additions were made to enhance customer service, since the effort to retrieve and study the actual document was significant and time-consuming until the early 2000s. With the advent of document imaging, it became much easier to offer a searcher a view of the actual document for evaluation.

There is a possible negative impact to adding information to the index: increased liability for the Recorder. This liability could arise from the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of a document.

Thus, the Property Records Index needs to be thought of as a living document. Items are added daily, items are changed daily, and corrections are made when discovered. The index needs to be as consistent and as straightforward as possible.

## Background

Throughout the approximately 3,600 recording jurisdictions in the United States, there appears to be little legislation or administrative regulation on how to index recorded documents. In the states of Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia, statewide indexing standards and rules were legislated, adopted,

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<sup>1</sup> In the United States, land document recording may take place at the State, City, Town, County, Borough, or Parish level. Depending on the jurisdiction, the Office of the Recorder may also be known as Recorder of Deeds, Registrar-General, Register of Deeds, Registrar of Deeds, Registrar of Titles, Deeds Registry, Auditor, or Deeds Office. In some states, the recording function is part of the county clerk's responsibilities. Throughout this paper, the term utilized for this role will simply be "Recorder."

or imposed on the various recording jurisdictions. It seems appropriate for those who are doing the work in the Recorders' offices throughout the country to take the time to review and discuss the rules and guidelines in place on how to index the property records in their jurisdiction. This concept especially comes into play as electronic recording continues to expand and submitters are asked to include some data indexing as part of the eRecording process.

## Process

An *Indexing of Grantor/Grantee Names* standard was written by Carl Ernst and adopted by PRIA on February 28, 2002. This standard identified numerous issues with legacy systems as well as then current systems, and the rapid changes in technology that affected indexing structure and use. It looked at a few states that had indexing standards in place and made recommendations as to what an indexing standard should include.

In the fall of 2013, PRIA agreed to review that 2002 standard and consider revisions due to today's technology and eRecording indexing issues. After review of that standard, a better approach seemed to be to take current indexing best practices adopted by various jurisdictions and develop a new generic compilation that could be used on a nation-wide level.

## Paper and Electronic Media

Historically, there was no expectation for submitters to provide any index data when presenting their paper document for recording. That has been viewed as the responsibility solely of the recorder. It is hoped that these Best Practices will be easily and efficiently incorporated into current and legacy recorder indexing software. These Best Practices were also written with a view of being used for both paper-based and eRecording documents. See PRIA Position Paper: *eDocument Index Data*, adopted by PRIA board on March 28, 2012, available on the PRIA website at [www.pria.us](http://www.pria.us)

eRecording continues to expand, and submission requirements still vary significantly among eRecording jurisdictions. This fact makes it extremely difficult for submitters to conform to each indexing rule set. Imagine conforming to 3,600 different variations simultaneously!

The adoption of nation-wide indexing best practices will help reduce eRecording rejection rates significantly. It is recommended that recording jurisdictions require only the minimum amount of index data necessary to corroborate that the submitted document data and associated image(s) match. Also, recording jurisdictions should set reasonable tolerance levels for accuracy of index data (allowing for slight misspellings, punctuation variances, and abbreviations, for example).

The only way to ensure the integrity of the indexes is for the recording jurisdiction to be responsible for, and to maintain, quality control. It is unrealistic and impractical to expect that the Recorder's internal staff expertise in indexing be duplicated by each submitter.

PRIA recommends that Recorders, submitters, aggregators, and eRecording software vendors work together to develop and refine technologies that will aid in the automated creation of index data.

## Procedure vs. Data Elements

Historically, storage and data entry costs drove many of the common indexing practices within the industry. The limited field lengths of legacy database systems, and significant input and data storage costs mandated the abbreviation of common names and words. Advances in technology, including expanded field lengths, optical character recognition, low cost storage, and programmatic quality control processes have allowed for more liberal input procedures and a “key it as you see it” approach to data entry. The advantages of this approach are reduced training times for keying operators, more consistent data elements, and overall improvement in data quality.

The term “key it as you see it” simply means that names and words are not abbreviated or expanded, nor are the spellings changed from how they appear on the documents. However, there remain certain naming conventions, punctuations (e.g., dashes, apostrophes), and special characters (e.g., @, &) that often require some special handling to keep search routines and outputs consistent.

It is important to note that the goal of creating indexing best practices is to normalize the data elements and improve the overall quality, efficiency, and confidence in searching the public land record systems. The normalization of data elements occurs most commonly through manual data entry procedures that standardize the data prior to input into a database. However, more and more land record systems employ programmatic enhancements that automatically normalize data upon input or accommodate variations in the data elements during the search routines themselves. Likewise, more modern systems now recognize and accommodate many of the special characters that legacy systems could not.

This paper focuses primarily on the manual procedures and ultimate data structures deemed necessary to achieve the desired consistency in the database elements across any land record system. The methodologies and procedures required to perform queries and searches of the indices themselves are beyond the scope of this paper.

The tools and sophistication of modern systems allow for greater flexibility with indexing procedures and should be considered when adopting these Best Practices for use with a specific system. Where appropriate, this paper will provide multiple options that address the limitations of legacy systems, as well as the abilities of modern database structures. Likewise, situations will arise where there is no clear “right” way to index something. In those cases, inputting data multiple times utilizing different formats is recommended to ensure discoverability.

## Section 1. General Principles

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### 1. Case

- A. Most recorders adopted the practice of using only capital letters at some point in the past (most likely due to system limitations at the time).
- B. Today, most computer search engines are case-insensitive.
- C. Recommend capital case letters throughout the Index.

### 2. Corrections

- A. Make corrections to the Index whenever and wherever necessary. However, incorrect information should never be deleted from the index: rather an additional index entry which has the corrected information should be added.
- B. Aim to make the Index consistent and accessible through the span of years. Provide a disclaimer indicating where, when, and why changes occurred.

### 3. Index as Shown on the Document

Index information as it appears on the documents. Key it as you see it! This statement applies to names and legal descriptions. If it is spelled incorrectly on the document, input exactly as shown.

### 4. Cross-Indexing

- A. Use common sense when cross-indexing by name variation (e.g., when you see a/k/a or f/k/a, key the second name separately).
- B. The 10-15 extra seconds it takes to cross-index a name variation may save hours of searching in the future.

### 5. Names to Input

- A. Input all involved parties' names as stated or signed on the document, whether acknowledged or not.
- B. For court papers, input all involved parties' names as stated in the document (i.e., go beyond the style of the case).
- C. Each jurisdiction must adopt a standard treatment for handling documents that contain fanciful party names (e.g., God, government officials), based on local considerations.

### 6. Numbers

- A. Arabic numbers stay as numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 10).
- B. Roman numerals stay as numerals (e.g., I, II, III, IV, X).
- C. System restrictions may require different variations.

### 7. Abbreviations

- A. Most recording jurisdictions now have an unlimited or 100 character field length for the party name field, so DO NOT ABBREVIATE, unless the abbreviation is on the document.
- B. If there is inadequate room in the name field, truncate at that point. Do not enter "etc" or any other such indicator.



## 8. Punctuation Marks<sup>2</sup>

- A. If there is a possessive apostrophe ('), use it (e.g., JOE'S).
- B. If there is an apostrophe (') in a name, use it (e.g., O'BRIEN).
- C. If there is a period (.), use it (e.g., BANK.COM).
- D. If there is a comma (,), use it. (e.g., ROMER, COOK & JONES).
- E. If there is a hyphen (-), use it. (e.g., ROSS-JONES APOTHCARY).
- F. If there is a slash (/), use it. (e.g., ROSS/JONES APOTHCARY).

## 9. Names of Individuals:

- A. Recommended format: LASTNAME FIRSTNAME MIDDLENAME/INITIAL SUFFIX
- B. Do NOT abbreviate individuals' names.
- C. Do NOT use prefix titles (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.).
- D. Do NOT use honorary titles (The Honorable, Reverend, Colonel).
- E. Do NOT use professional/occupational titles (MD, PhD, JD, CPA, MDPA).
- F. Do ADD generational suffix titles (Jr., Sr., II, III, IV).
- G. Do ADD "capacity" titles (Trustee, Personal Representative, Guardian, etc.). These titles can be abbreviated, as needed, for space reasons.

## 10. Names of Corporations/Organizations

- A. Recommended format: Index it as seen/shown on the document.
- B. If "The" is part of the official name, use it.
- C. If "A" is part of the official name, use it.

## 11. Names of Governmental Units

- A. Index it as you see it on the document.
- B. Do NOT use abbreviations unless abbreviated on the document.

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<sup>2</sup> Use depends upon current system handling.

## Section 2. Indexing Individual Names

### 1. Single Last Names

Index as: LASTNAME FIRSTNAME MIDDLENAME/INITIALS SUFFIX

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Richard and Sarah Marshall	MARSHALL RICHARD MARSHALL SARAH
John J. Brown	BROWN JOHN J.
Dorothy Brown	BROWN DOROTHY
William Samuel Jones III	JONES WILLIAM SAMUEL III
J R Smith	SMITH J R

NOTE: Avoid the use of “Mr.” and “Mrs.” Use only when first name for the individual is not set out. If last name is not set out, DO NOT assume the last name is the same.

Mrs. John J Brown	BROWN JOHN J MRS.
Mr. and Mrs. Brown	BROWN MR. BROWN MRS.
Richard Marshall and spouse	MARSHALL RICHARD
John Smith & Jane Smith	SMITH JOHN SMITH JANE

### 2. Last Name Prefixes and Compound Names

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Mary Der Kegan	DER KEGIAN MARY
Harold McCoy	MCCOY HAROLD
John Mac Donald	MAC DONALD JOHN
Walter Van de Kamp	VAN DE KAMP WALTER
Ted de Grazia	DE GRAZIA TED
John L. St. George	ST. GEORGE JOHN L.
Jean Saint Martin	SAINT MARTIN JEAN
Dorothy Ste. Marie	STE. MARIE DOROTHY
Diane de la Varga	DE LA VARGA DIANE

### 3. Hyphenated Last Names of Individuals

USE the hyphen as follows. Index entries showing "\*" are optional double indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Cecil P. Spring-Rice	SPRING-RICE CECIL P. RICE CECIL P. SPRING-*
Blanche Duff-Gordon	DUFF-GORDON BLANCHE GORDON BLANCHE DUFF-*

### 4. Common Middle Name or Two Word Last Name with No Hyphen

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Joyce Martin Gray	GRAY JOYCE MARTIN
Hernando Gomez Gonzalez	GONZALEZ HERNANDO GOMEZ

### 5. Individual Names Beginning with Honorary Title

Any known honorary title should be ignored.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Rev. John W. Jones	JONES JOHN W.
Captain Robert Baker	BAKER ROBERT
The Honorable Roy Jones	JONES ROY

### 6. Individual Names Ending with Professional Title

Any known professional title should NOT be used.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Betty R. Smith, CPA	SMITH BETTY R.
Norma Jane Baker, MD	BAKER NORMA JANE
Judson Starr, Esq.	STARR JUDSON

## 7. Parentheticals and Nicknames

If it appears to be a nickname and is typed or signed, DO pick up the variation.

Index as follows. Index entries showing "\*" are optional double indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
James (Jim) Smith	SMITH JAMES (JIM) SMITH JIM*
George "Rocky" Brown	BROWN GEORGE " ROCKY" BROWN ROCKY*
Mary (Smith) Brown	BROWN MARY (SMITH) SMITH MARY BROWN*

If a portion of a name appears in parenthesis and the intent is NOT clear, INDEX each possible variation

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
R Margaret Watts (Barber)	BARBER R MARGARET WATTS WATTS (BARBER) R MARGARET WATTS R MARGARET (BARBER)

## 8. Foreign Names

Index last name as surname and other names in order shown:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Federico Sanchez Martinez	MARTINEZ FEDERICO SANCHEZ
Magda Maria de Sanchez	DE SANCHEZ MAGDA MARIA
Tuey Far Low	LOW TUEY FAR
Bill Soo Hoo	HOO BILL SOO
King Chana	CHANA KING

## 9. "Also Known As" or "Formerly Known As" Names (a/k/a and f/k/a)

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Mary Smith Brown a/k/a Mary Smith	BROWN MARY SMITH SMITH MARY
Jean Jones Williams f/k/a Jean Jones	WILLIAMS JEAN JONES JONES JEAN

## 10. Individual's Name Abbreviated

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Chas. Jackson	JACKSON CHAS.
Wm. Gardner	GARDNER WM.
Jos. Brown	BROWN JOS.

## 11. Multiple Unidentified Parties (Unknown Tenants, Spouses, Heirs, Trustees, et al, etc.)

Index the individuals shown and DO NOT add the unidentified parties or the phrase "et al."

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Ringo Starr, et al	STARR RINGO

## 12. Trust Names are treated as an Organization.

Index it as you see it. Some variations to this are those that index all documents as LAST NAME, FIRST NAME, MIDDLE INITIAL, TRUST indicated by "\*" in entry below

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
John J Smith Living Trust	JOHN J SMITH LIVING TRUST
John J Smith Living Trust	SMITH JOHN J LIVING TRUST*

## Section 3. Indexing Corporation/Organization Names

### 1. General Rules

#### Names of Corporations/Organizations

- A. Recommended format: Index it as seen/shown.
- B. Use “The” at the beginning of a firm name, if it is part of the official name.
- C. Use “A” at the beginning of a firm name, if it is part of the official name.

#### Punctuation Marks

- A. Use punctuation marks and symbols.
- B. If there is a possessive apostrophe (’), use it (e.g., JOE’S)
- C. If there is an apostrophe (‘) in a name, use it (e.g., O’BRIEN)
- D. If there is a period (.), use it. (e.g., BANK.COM)
- E. If there is a comma (,), use it. (e.g., ROMER, COOK & JONES)
- F. If there is a hyphen (-), use it. (e.g., ROSS-JONES APOTHCARY)
- G. If there is a slash (/), use it. (e.g., D/3 Motor Parts)

### 2. Firm Names Containing Given Names or Initials

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
A L Johnson Corporation	A L JOHNSON CORPORATION
J and A Smith Co	J AND A SMITH CO
Marshall Holmes Bean Co	MARSHALL HOLMES BEAN CO
Marshall Field and Co	MARSHALL FIELD AND CO
Montgomery Ward & Co	MONTGOMERY WARD & CO
J. C. Penney	J. C. PENNEY
B. W. Paper Box Corp.	B. W. PAPER BOX CORP.
Virginia Insurance Corporation	VIRGINIA INSURANCE CORPORATION
Cecil W. Spring-Rice Title Co	CECIL W. SPRING-RICE TITLE CO
David Mac Donald Escrow	DAVID MAC DONALD ESCROW
Crown Savings Bank of New York	CROWN SAVINGS BANK OF NEW YORK
DiTech.com	DITECH. COM
Net.B@nk	NET.B@NK

### 3. Firm Names Containing Hyphens, Commas, Apostrophe, Slashes, Parenthesis, the Word "And", or the "&" symbol.

Index as the names appear as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Scripps-Booth Company	SCRIPPS-BOOTH COMPANY
Romer, Cooke, and Jones Inc.	ROMER, COOKE, AND JONES INC.
O'Malley and Johnson, Inc.	O'MALLEY AND JOHNSON, INC.
Liggett and Myers Corporation	LIGGETT AND MYERS CORPORATION
Bar-B-Q Pit of Florida	BAR-B-Q PIT OF FLORIDA
Ed's Bar B-Q	ED'S BAR B-Q
Neiman-Marcus	NEIMAN-MARCUS
W-G Development Corp	W-G DEVELOPMENT CORP
M & A Alexander Productions	M & A ALEXANDER PRODUCTIONS
D/L Aluminum Products, Inc.	D/L ALUMINUM PRODUCTS, INC.
McPherson's Pharmacy	MCPHERSON'S PHARMACY
Joe D'Andre 1980's Bar	JOE D'ANDRE 1980'S BAR
Century 21 (R) Mortgage (SM)	CENTURY 21 (R) MORTGAGE (SM)

### 4. Names Using Numbers, Symbols, and Letters

Index as shown on the document, using hyphens, slashes, apostrophes, etc. as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
A-1 Auto Parts	A-1 AUTO PARTS
D/3 Motor Oil Inc.	D/3 MOTOR OIL INC.
Eiger's Rte 85 Truck Stop	EIGER'S RTE 85 TRUCK STOP
1-Hour Photo	1-HOUR PHOTO
\$1 Store	\$1 STORE
Dollar Store	DOLLAR STORE
I-4 Pass-the-Buck Inc.	I-4 PASS-THE-BUCK INC.
Proviso IV Company	PROVISO IV COMPANY
Crest No 2 Company	CREST NO 2 COMPANY
No. 6 Speckels, Inc.	NO. 6 SPECKELS, INC.

### 5. Coined Names and Trade Names

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Sam the Tailor	SAM THE TAILOR
Rose Hill Memorial Park	ROSE HILL MEMORIAL PARK
Captain Post's Shoe Co.	CAPTAIN POST'S SHOE CO.
Mr. Paul's Fashions	MR. PAUL'S FASHIONS
Sir Walter Raleigh Motel	SIR WALTER RALEIGH MOTEL

## 6. Geographic Directional Words in a Name

Index as: as follows

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
North East Canal Corp.	NORTH EAST CANAL CORP.
Southeast Water Company	SOUTHEAST WATER COMPANY
5010 W. Kennedy Associates	5010 W. KENNEDY ASSOCIATES
123 NW OBT, Inc.	123 NW OBT, INC.

## 7. Location Words in a Firm Name

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Crown Savings Bank of Iowa	CROWN SAVINGS BANK OF IOWA
Bank of Brandon at Lutz	BANK OF BRANDON AT LUTZ
Robinson's of Florida	ROBINSON'S OF FLORIDA
Pacific Finance Co San Diego	PACIFIC FINANCE CO SAN DIEGO
Steel & Iron Co Dallas	STEEL & IRON CO DALLAS
Baptist Church Orlando	BAPTIST CHURCH ORLANDO